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DOROTHY Q TOGETHER WITHOS A BALLADOF THE BOSTON TEA PARIY GO/ORND GRANDMATHERS STORY OF BVNKER HILL JBATTLEGO





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Dorothy Q

A Ballad of the Boston Tea Party Grandmother's Story of Bunker Hill Battle By Oliver Wendell Holmes With Illustrations by Howard Pyle



Boston and New York Houghton, Mifflin and Company Che Riverside Press, Cambridge M DCCC XCIII 1693

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OROTHY QUINCY, the subject of the first poem in this volume, was aunt of the first Josiah Quincy, Junior, "that fervid orator who expended

his life for the cause of his country, dying on shipboard in sight of home, as he returned from England after hostilities had begun only seven days." She was also the aunt of a second Dorothy Quincy, who became the wife of John Hancock, President of the first Continental Congress.

The painting hung in the house of my grandfather, Oliver Wendell, which was occupied by British officers before the evacuation of Boston. One of these gentlemen amused himself by stabbing poor Dorothy (the pictured one) as near the right eye as his swordsmanship would serve him to do it. The canvas was so decayed that it became necessary to remount the painting, in the process of doing which the hole made by the rapier was lost sight of. I took some photographs of the picture before it was transferred to the new canvas.

The tax on tea, which was considered so odious and led to the act on which A Ballad of the Boston Tea Party is founded, was but a small matter, only two pence in the pound. But it involved a principle of taxation, to which the Colonies would not submit. Their objection was not to the amount, but the claim. The East India Company, however, sent out a number of tea-ships to different American ports, three of them to Boston.

The inhabitants tried to send them back, but in vain. The captains of the ships had consented, if permitted, to return with their cargoes to England, but the consignees refused to discharge them from their obligations, the custom house to give them a clearance for their return, and the governor to grant them a passport for going by the fort. It was easily seen that the tea would be gradually landed from the ships lying so near the town, and that if landed it would be disposed of, and the purpose of establishing the monopoly and raising a revenue effected. To prevent the dreaded consequence, a number of armed men, disguised like Indians, boarded the ships and threw their whole cargoes of tea into the dock. About seventeen persons boarded the ships in Boston harbor, and emptied three hundred and forty-two chests of tea.1 Among these "Indians" was Major Thomas Mel-

¹ Holmes's Annals of America, vol. ii. pp. 181-2.

ville, the same who suggested to me the poem, "The Last Leaf."

The story of Bunker Hill battle is told as literally in accordance with the best authorities as it would have been if it had been written in prose instead of in verse. I have often been asked what steeple it was from which the little group I speak of looked upon the conflict. To this I answer that I am not prepared to speak authoritatively, but that the reader may take his choice among all the steeples standing at that time in the northern part of the city. Christ Church in Salem Street is the one I always think of, but I do not insist upon its claim. As to the personages who made up the small company that followed the old corporal, it would be hard to identify them, but by ascertaining where the portrait by Copley is now to be found, some light may be thrown on their personality.

Daniel Malcolm's gravestone, splintered by British bullets, may be seen in the Copp's Hill burial-ground.

O. W. H.



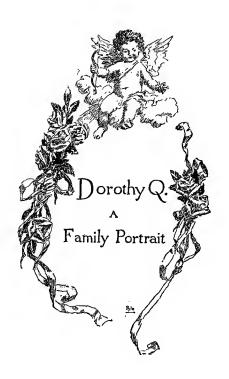


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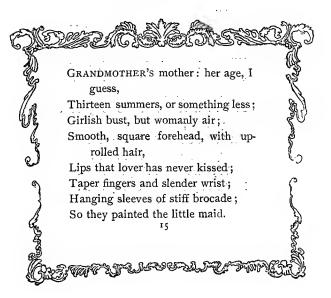


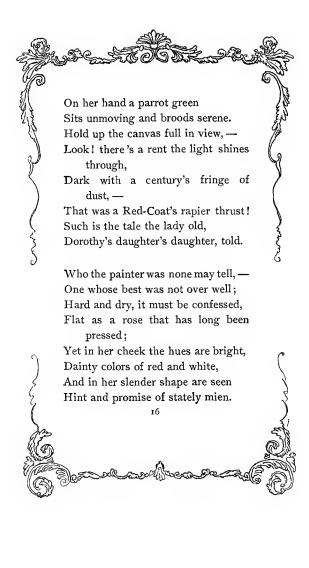






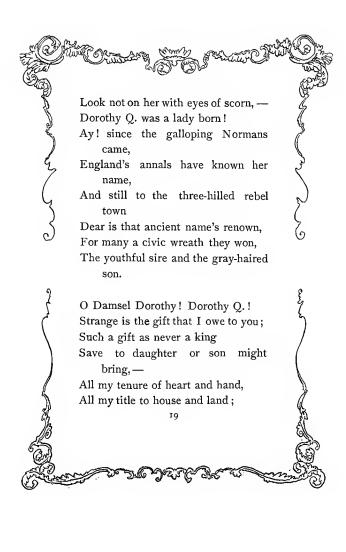
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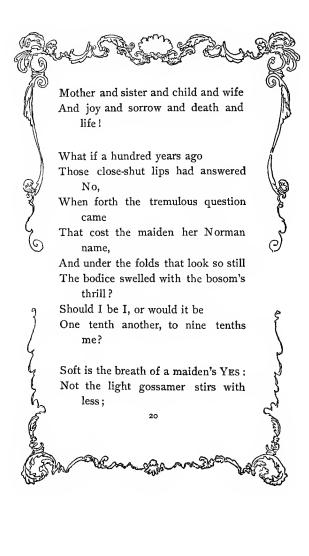






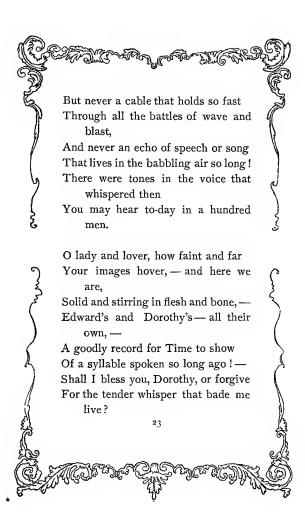


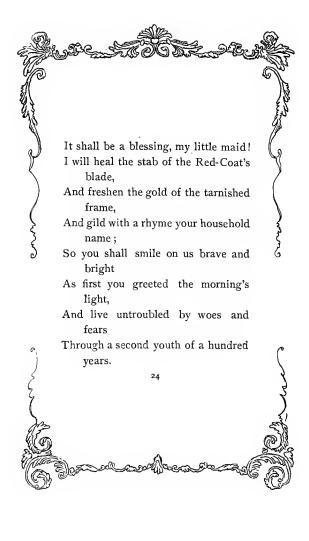






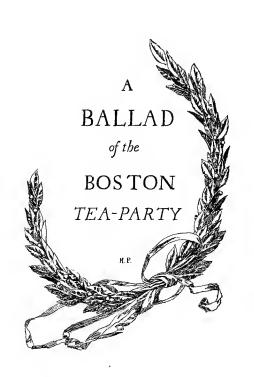




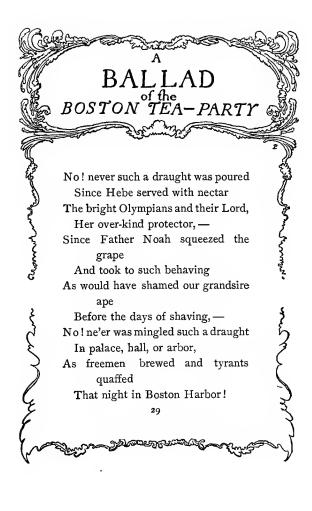










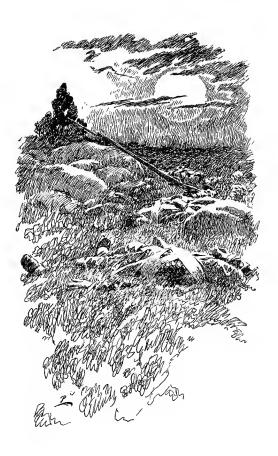




It kept King George so long awake,
His brain at last got addled,
It made the nerves of Britain shake,
With sevenscore millions saddled;
Before that bitter cup was drained,
Amid the roar of cannon,
The Western war-cloud's crimson
stained
The Thames, the Clyde, the Shannon;

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Full many a six-foot grenadier

The flattened grass had measured,
And many a mother many a year

Her tearful memories treasured;
Fast spread the tempest's darkening
pall,

The mighty realms were troubled, The storm broke loose, but first of all The Boston teapot bubbled!





An evening party, — only that,
No formal invitation,
No gold-laced coat, no stiff cravat,
No feast in contemplation,
No silk-robed dames, no fiddling band,
No flowers, no songs, no dancing, —
A tribe of red men, axe in hand, —
Behold the guests advancing!











How fast the stragglers join the throng,

From stell and workshop cathoned to

From stall and workshop gathered!
The lively barber skips along,
And leaves a chin half-lathered;





The smith has flung his hammer down,—

The horseshoe still is glowing; The truant tapster at the Crown Has left a beer-cask flowing;









The cooper's boys have dropped the adze,

And trot behind their master; Up run the tarry ship-yard lads, — The crowd is hurrying faster, —





Out from the Millpond's purlieus gush

The streams of white-faced millers, And down their slippery alleys rush The lusty young Fort-Hillers;











The ropewalk lends its 'prentice crew,—

The tories seize the omen:

"Ay, boys, you'll soon have work to do

For England's rebel foemen,

'King Hancock,' Adams, and their gang,

That fire the mob with treason, — When these we shoot and those we hang,

The town will come to reason."

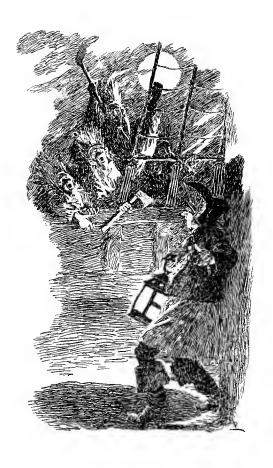




On — on to where the tea-ships ride!

And now their ranks are forming, —
A rush, and up the Dartmouth's side
The Mohawk band is swarming!
See the fierce natives! What a glimpse
Of paint and fur and feather,
As all at once the full-grown imps
Light on the deck together!
A scarf the pigtail's secret keeps,
A blanket hides the breeches, —
And out the cursèd cargo leaps,
And overboard it pitches!









O woman, at the evening board
So gracious, sweet, and purring,
So happy while the tea is poured,
So blest while spoons are stirring,
What martyr can compare with thee,
The mother, wife, or daughter,
That night, instead of best Bohea,
Condemned to milk and water!





Ah, little dreams the quiet dame Who plies with rock and spindle The patient flax, how great a flame You little spark shall kindle! The lurid morning shall reveal A fire no king can smother, Where British flint and Boston steel Have clashed against each other! Old charters shrivel in its track, His Worship's bench has crumbled, It climbs and clasps the union-jack, Its blazoned pomp is humbled, The flags go down on land and sea Like corn before the reapers; So burned the fire that brewed the tea That Boston served her keepers!









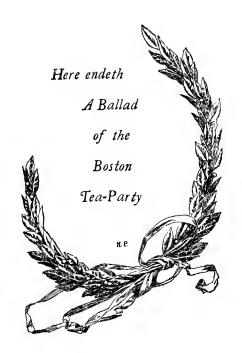


The waves that wrought a century's wreck

Have rolled o'er whig and tory;
The Mohawks on the Dartmouth's deck

deck
Still live in song and story;
The waters in the rebel bay
Have kept the tea-leaf savor;
Our old North-Enders in their spray
Still taste a Hyson flavor;
And Freedom's teacup still o'erflows
With ever fresh libations,
To cheat of slumber all her foes
And cheer the wakening nations!



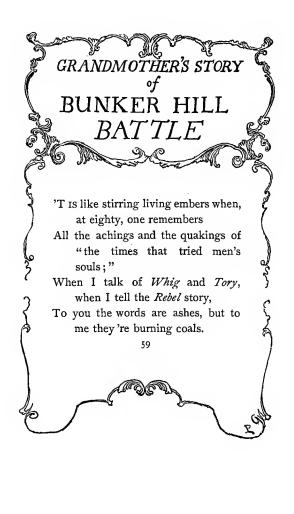














I had heard the muskets' rattle of the April running battle;
Lord Percy's hunted soldiers, I can see their red coats still;
But a deadly chill comes o'er me, as the day looms up before me,
When a thousand men lay bleeding on the slopes of Bunker's Hill.









'T was a peaceful summer's morning, when the first thing gave us warning

Was the booming of the cannon from the river and the shore:

"Child," says grandma, "what's the matter, what is all this noise and clatter?

Have those scalping Indian devils come to murder us once more?"





Poor old soul! my sides were shaking in the midst of all my quaking,

To hear her talk of Indians when the guns began to roar:

She had seen the burning village, and the slaughter and the pillage,

When the Mohawks killed her father with their bullets through his door.









Then I said, "Now, dear old granny, don't you fret and worry any,
For I 'll soon come back and tell you whether this is work or play;
There can't be mischief in it, so I won't be gone a minute"—
For a minute then I started. I was gone the livelong day.





No time for bodice-lacing or for looking-glass grimacing;

Down my hair went as I hurried, tumbling half-way to my heels;

God forbid your ever knowing, when there's blood around her flowing,

How the lonely, helpless daughter of a quiet household feels!









In the street I heard a thumping; and I knew it was the stumping
Of the Corporal, our old neighbor, on that wooden leg he wore,
With a knot of women round him, —
it was lucky I had found him,
So I followed with the others, and the
Corporal marched before.



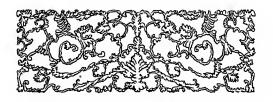


They were making for the steeple,—
the old soldier and his people;
The pigeons circled round us as we climbed the creaking stair,
Just across the narrow river—oh, so close it made me shiver!—
Stood a fortress on the hill-top that but yesterday was bare.









Not slow our eyes to find it; well we knew who stood behind it,

Though the earthwork hid them from us, and the stubborn walls were dumb:

Here were sister, wife, and mother, looking wild upon each other,

And their lips were white with terror as they said, THE HOUR HAS COME!





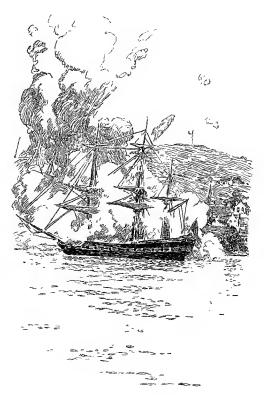
The morning slowly wasted, not a morsel had we tasted,

And our heads were almost splitting with the cannons' deafening thrill,

When a figure tall and stately round the rampart strode sedately;

It was Prescott, one since told me; he commanded on the hill.











Every woman's heart grew bigger when we saw his manly figure,
With the banyan buckled round it,
standing up so straight and tall;
Like a gentleman of leisure who is
strolling out for pleasure,
Through the storm of shells and cannon-shot he walked around the
wall.





At eleven the streets were swarming, for the red-coats' ranks were forming;

At noon in marching order they were moving to the piers;

How the bayonets gleamed and glistened, as we looked far down, and listened

To the trampling and the drum-beat of the belted grenadiers!









At length the men have started, with a cheer (it seemed faint-hearted), In their scarlet regimentals, with their knapsacks on their backs, And the reddening, rippling water, as after a sea-fight's slaughter, Round the barges gliding onward blushed like blood along their

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tracks.

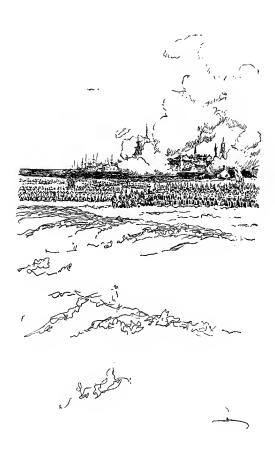


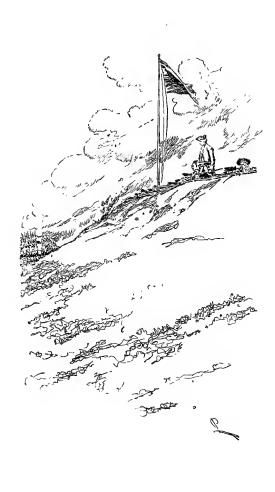


So they crossed to the other border, and again they formed in order; And the boats came back for soldiers, came for soldiers, soldiers still: The time seemed everlasting to us women faint and fasting, —
At last they're moving, marching,

marching proudly up the hill. 84









We can see the bright steel glancing all along the lines advancing —

Now the front rank fires a volley —
they have thrown away their shot;

For behind their earthwork lying, all the balls above them flying,

Our people need not hurry; so they wait and answer not.





Then the Corporal, our old cripple (he would swear sometimes and tipple), —

He had heard the bullets whistle (in the old French war) before,—

Calls out in words of jeering, just as if they all were hearing, —

And his wooden leg thumps fiercely on the dusty belfry floor:—

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"Oh! fire away, ye villains, and earn King George's shillin's,

But ye'll waste a ton of powder afore a 'rebel' falls;

You may bang the dirt and welcome, they're as safe as Dan'l Malcolm

Ten foot beneath the gravestone that you've splintered with your balls!"





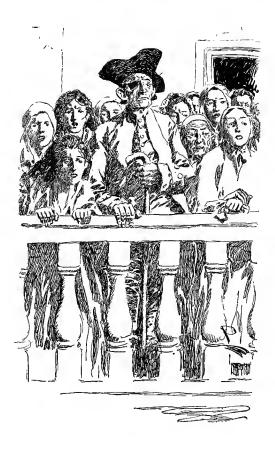
In the hush of expectation, in the awe and trepidation

Of the dread approaching moment, we are well-nigh breathless all;

Though the rotten bars are failing on the rickety belfry railing,

We are crowding up against them like the waves against a wall.









Just a glimpse (the air is clearer), they are nearer, — nearer, nearer,

When a flash — a curling smokewreath — then a crash — the steeple shakes —

The deadly truce is ended; the tempest's shroud is rended;

Like a morning mist it gathered, like a thunder-cloud it breaks!





Oh the sight our eyes discover as the blue-black smoke blows over!

The red-coats stretched in windrows as a mower rakes his hay;

Here a scarlet heap is lying, there a headlong crowd is flying

Like a billow that has broken and is shivered into spray.









Then we cried, "The troops are routed! they are beat — it can't be doubted!

God be thanked, the fight is over!"

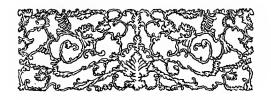
— Ah! the grim old soldier's smile!

"Tell us, tell us why you look so?"
(we could hardly speak, we shook so),—

"Are they beaten? Are they beaten?

Are they beaten?"—"Wait a while."





Oh the trembling and the terror! for too soon we saw our error:

They are baffled, not defeated; we have driven them back in vain;

And the columns that were scattered, round the colors that were tattered,

Toward the sullen, silent fortress turn their belted breasts again.









All at once, as we are gazing, lo the roofs of Charlestown blazing!

They have fired the harmless village; in an hour it will be down!

The Lord in heaven confound them, rain his fire and brimstone round them, —

The robbing, murdering red-coats, that would burn a peaceful town!





They are marching, stern and solemn; we can see each massive column As they near the naked earth-mound with the slanting walls so steep. Have our soldiers got faint-hearted, and in noiseless haste departed? Are they panic-struck and helpless? Are they palsied or asleep?









Now! the walls they 're almost under! scarce a rod the foes asunder!

Not a firelock flashed against them! up the earthwork they will swarm!

But the words have scarce been spoken, when the ominous calm is broken,

And a bellowing crash has emptied all the vengeance of the storm!





So again, with murderous slaughter, pelted backwards to the water,

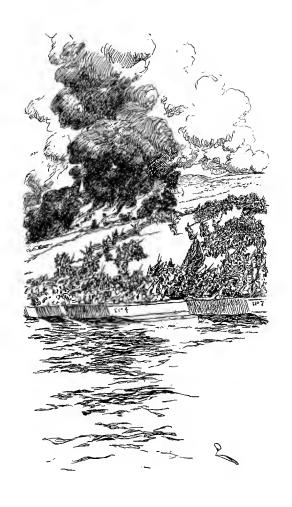
Fly Pigot's running heroes and the frightened braves of Howe;

And we shout, "At last they 're' done for, it's their barges they have run for:

They are beaten, beaten; and the battle 's over now!"











And we looked, poor timid creatures, on the rough old soldier's features,

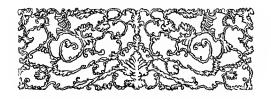
Our lips afraid to question, but he knew what we would ask:

"Not sure," he said; "keep quiet, — once more, I guess, they'll try it —

Here 's damnation to the cut-throats!"
— then he handed me his flask,

III

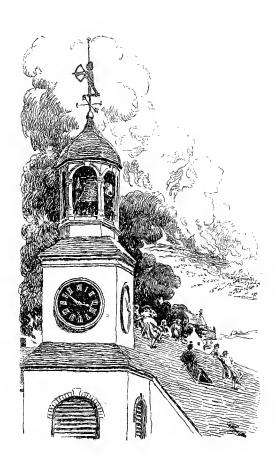




Saying, "Gal, you're looking shaky;
have a drop of old Jamaiky;
I'm afeard there'll be more trouble
afore the job is done;"
So I took one scorching swallow;
dreadful faint I felt and hollow,
Standing there from early morning
when the firing was begun.









All through those hours of trial I had watched a calm clock dial,

As the hands kept creeping, creeping,

— they were creeping round to
four,

When the old man said, "They're forming with their bagonets fixed for storming:

It's the death-grip that's a-coming,
— they will try the works once
more."





With brazen trumpets blaring, the flames behind them glaring,
The deadly wall before them, in close array they come;
Still onward, upward toiling, like a dragon's fold uncoiling, —
Like the rattlesnake's shrill warning

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the reverberating drum!









Over heaps all torn and gory — shall I tell the fearful story,

How they surged above the breastwork, as a sea breaks over a deck;

How, driven, yet scarce defeated, our worn-out men retreated,

With their powder-horns all emptied, like the swimmers from a wreck?

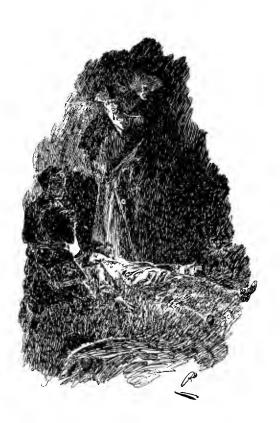




It has all been told and painted; as for me, they say I fainted,
And the wooden-legged old Corporal stumped with me down the stair:
When I woke from dreams affrighted the evening lamps were lighted,—
On the floor a youth was lying; his bleeding breast was bare.









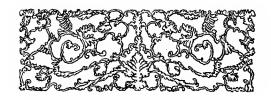
And I heard through all the flurry, "Send for WARREN! hurry! hurry!

Tell him here 's a soldier bleeding, and he'll come and dress his wound!"

Ah, we knew not till the morrow told its tale of death and sorrow,

How the starlight found him stiffened on the dark and bloody ground.





Who the youth was, what his name was, where the place from which he came was,

Who had brought him from the battle, and had left him at our door, He could not speak to tell us; but 't was one of our brave fellows,

As the homespun plainly showed us which the dying soldier wore.











For they all thought he was dying, as they gathered round him crying,—

And they said, "Oh, how they 'll miss him!" and "What will his mother do?"

Then, his eyelids just unclosing like a child's that has been dozing,

He faintly murmured, "Mother!"
— and — I saw his eyes were blue.





"Why, grandma, how you're winking!" Ah, my child, it sets me thinking

Of a story not like this one. Well, he somehow lived along;

So we came to know each other, and I nursed him like a — mother,

Till at last he stood before me, tall, and rosy-cheeked, and strong.











And we sometimes walked together in the pleasant summer weather,

— "Please to tell us what his name

was?" Just your own, my little dear, —

There's his picture Copley painted: we became so well acquainted,

That — in short, that's why I'm grandma, and you children all are here!"



